SHURABA LOVERS

しゅらばら！

著者 **岸 杯也**
KISHI HAIYA

イラスト **プリンプリン**
PURINPURIN

MF文庫J

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Shurabara! - Volume 01 Chapter 00-03

Table of Contents

1. Novel Illustrations
2. Prologue
3. Chapter 1: It's Not My Popular Period
4. Chapter 2: Congratulations, Our Kazuhiro-kun
5. Chapter 3: Hunted After by MIB?

Novel Illustrations

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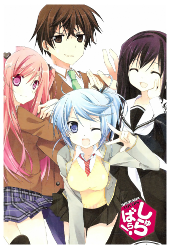
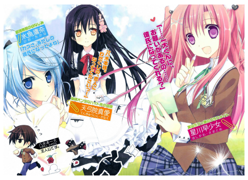
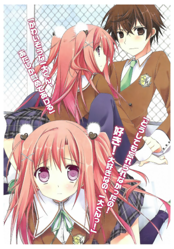
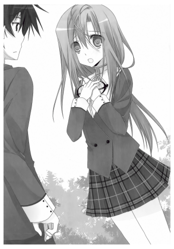
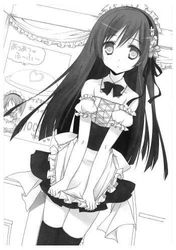
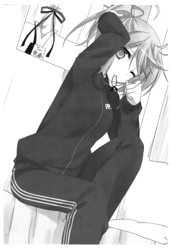
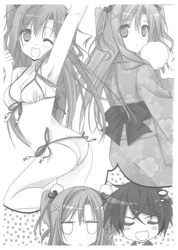
- 
- 
- 
- 

  Page 13
- 

  Page 29
- 

- Page 40

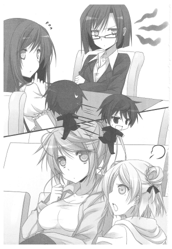
- Page 90

- Page 133

- Page 159

- Page 185

- Page 221

Page 239

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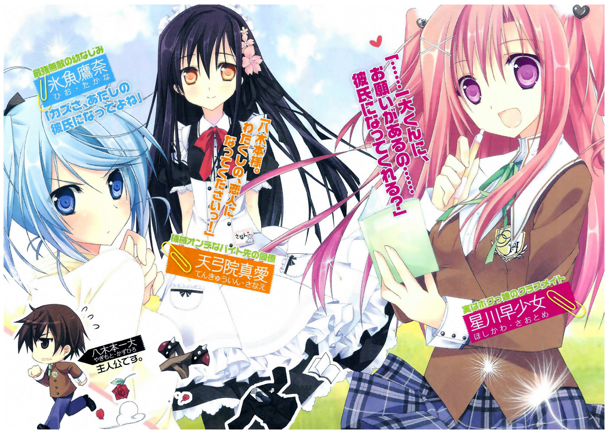
Page 255

Prologue

Prologue[edit]

SHURABA LOVERS
しゅらばら!


「……一大くんに、お願いがあるの……彼氏になってくれる?」
実はボクっ娘のクラスメイト
星川早少女
ほしかわ・さおとめ
「八木本様。わたくしの、恋人になってくださいっ!」
機械オンチなバイト先の同僚
天弓院真愛
てんきゅういん・さなえ
最強無敵の幼なじみ
氷魚鷹奈
ひお・たかな
「カズさ、あたしの彼氏になってよね!」
八木本一大
やぎもと・かずひろ
主人公です。

「どうしても忘れられなかったの！好き！大好きなの、一大くんっ！」
「かわいそうな一大くん、あたしが慰めてあげる」

The wind of May blew toward him with the delicate fragrance of the nature. The classroom after school was filled with a tender sensation.

With her head lowered in shyness, the girl with flushed cheeks gazed at the boy’s gentle, smiling face.

“Err… Yagimoto-kun.”

From her cherry-red lips came a clear bell-like voice.

“I'm glad I was able to meet you...”

When the girl raised her head, her pupils were slightly moist.

The boy looked at the girl with tenderness and love.

“After all…”

Step by step. The young girl approached the boy.

“Thanks to you, I’m going out with Takeshi-kun!”

The youth’s smile was slowly convulsing. Yet, the girl did not notice.

“Haha… I am glad to be of help. After all, Miki-chan and I are friends.”

“I’m also glad that I'm friends with such a good person like Yagimoto-kun. Thanks☆”

After the two shook hands. Miki immediately released her grip, and promptly left the scene.

Fallen leaves from the trees fell on top of the abandoned boy’s hair.

“Wu…wahhhh… Ah! Again! Why is it always this kind of ending?”

The youth scratched his head, shouting while stomping his foot on the ground hysterically.

The tree leaves, which had rested on top of his hair, dropped beside his feet.

Kazuhiro Yagimoto of year-2 class-3 is a good person.

This is something that all of Kyuhito High's students, especially the girls, can guarantee.

“I didn’t become a good guy because I wanted to!”

He cursed his bad luck within his mind, and stomped on the ground continuously.

"I only want a girlfriend! But why! God only give me the 'good guy' treatment!"

Actually, his fate was not the manipulations of god.

He was also well aware of his own shortcomings.

He did not want to be hated by girls. Hence, he always acted like a gentleman.

He never openly expressed his inner, hormonal desires. He also frequently brought about an air of humor.

When needed by others, he could never turn down the requests.

He only had an average appearance in terms of good looks, but he always tried hard to maintain a healthy and bright image.

As a result, he has earned the girls’ trusts. He was often bossed around by the girls in his class to do their biddings.

Most of the requests were similar to the situation just now, including matters like "I want to know how he feels about me" and "I hope you can be a match-maker".

There were thirteen couples, twenty-six people, in this school, all of which were made possible by the help of Kazuhiro.

It was almost as if he was "the male friend who helps the protagonist in getting a girlfriend" kind of character in a Galgame.

Come to think of it. His neighbor plus childhood-friend and his junior colleague also said that they needed help. Could it be that they wanted me to be a match-maker as well?

“Aaaaaah! I really want a girlfriend!"

Although it was his own doing, he did not really want to only be “a good guy” and “a good friend”.

Kazuhiro could not speak out his true desires in front of girls. He could only roll around on the lawn and shout out loudly in frustration.

Nobody would find out about his strange behavior anyways. Though, rolling on the lawn without restraint really made him look like a dangerous individual.

No, that wasn't right.

The “no” in last sentence wasn’t negating the fact that “this person looks dangerous”.

Instead, the “no” was referring to the fact that “nobody will see” this incident.

However, hiding under the shade of the tree, a person happened to be staring at Kazuhiro’s strange behavior.

“Gaaaooo!”

Kazuhiro jumped up in shock, and immediately tidied himself while sitting down properly.

The one who saw his strange behavior was Saotome Hoshikawa, a girl who was in the same class as him.

This girl had left a strong impression in his mind because of her normalness.

She wore thick-framed glasses that are rare in this era, and her hair was only tied up in a simple leather band.

Her normalness did not only come from her thick-framed glasses.

If adding in the time for lecture and for reading books, usually ninety-percent of the girls would wear glasses. However, they all chose the type of glasses that best fit their looks.

Among them, only Saotome wore vintage glasses, the type that would only make its appearance in paintings.

“Err, err… haha…”

Crap. This is a serious situation.

So as not to hurt the feelings of the girls, Kazuhiro usually used words with caution.

He did this because he knew that the girls’ gossip was a thing to be feared.

If his strange behavior just now were leaked to the public, Kazuhiro would definitely transform from a “good guy” to “a lewd hentai who just pretends to be a good guy”, in the eyes of the girls.

His public assessment would plummet. It could be compared to a failure in nose-diving through the atmosphere, causing a combustion in the stratosphere, and then falling straight to the surface of earth. In the end, he would vanish without a trace.

“…Did you see it?” Kazuhiro asked.

Saotome opened her cherry-colored lips and said with certainty, “I have seen everything.”

Her clear voice resounded in Kazuhiro’s ears.

Now that Kazuhiro thought about it. Even though he was in the same class as Saotome, he seldom heard her voice.

“I’m not referring to your rolling on the lawn just now. I have been looking at you ever since you tried so hard for Miki…well that’s not correct… even before that, I have been taking special notice of Mr. Yagimoto… Kazuhiro-kun.”

“Eh? Eeeh? What are you saying?”

After witnessing a shocking declaration of “I want a girlfriend” while rolling on the lawn, Saotome did not react in the same way that Kazuhiro expected.

Moreover, she also said that “she has always took special notice of him”. She even called him by his name.

Could it be possible that Kazuhiro’s dreams were true?

Saotome’s slender fingers moved towards her glasses frame, and she slowly took off the glasses.

Under the thick lenses were a pair of stunning eyes.

Saotome’s eyes, complemented by long eyebrows, were staring straight at Kazuhiro Because the glasses usually covered up Saotome’s face, Kazuhiro never noticed her full countenance. She had a carefully crafted face, a sharp nose, lips with a size that was just right, and a pair of big, round eyes. Her face was the definition of perfection.

With her looks, she would qualify for the most beautiful girl in the entire school.

To think that the “take off the glasses and suddenly become a beauty” kind of situation actually exist in real life!

The true appearance that no other boys had known, only Kazuhiro has witnessed it!

Unadorned glasses viva!

Unadorned glasses bravo!

Unadorned glasses banzai!

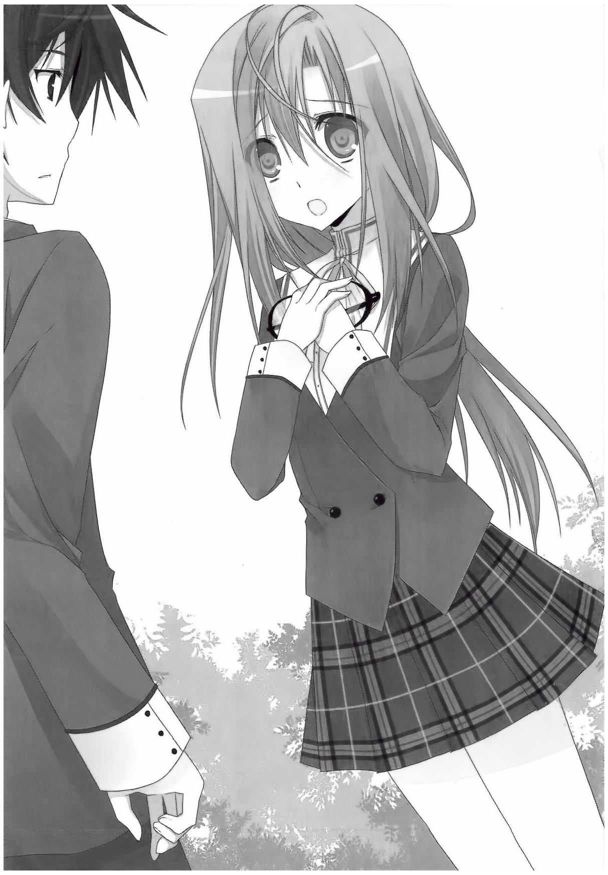
“Actually, Kazuhiro-kun, I have a request.”

Her silky, white arms clasped together in front of her chest.

Her voice was soft, but voiced in a meticulous, clear manner.

“W-what?”

Kazuhiro’s anticipation grew rapidly. He felt as if he might explode.



“Could you be my b-boyfriend?”

“Of course!”

Kazuhiro replied without hesitation. He could hardly suppress the urge of shouting “banzai” in a loud voice.

This day has finally come. It must be the prize given by God for always acting in the role of a “good guy”!

Thank you, God! Good job! You should granted this prize ages ago!

Please forget my disrespectful curses moments ago, Kazuhiro shouted in his heart.

At this moment, Kazuhiro was filled with a gratefulness that was hard to express in words.

However, this only lasted an instant.

Chapter 1: It's Not My Popular Period

Chapter 1: It's Not My Popular Period[edit]

Part 1[edit]

Always read books in the classroom alone. Tried hard in class. A person whose test scores were above average. Did not join a club or the student council. Belonged solely to the "go home club" after school.

That was the kind of girl Saotome Hoshikawa was.

Although she didn’t have many friends, it did not mean that she was isolated from the social circle. It was just that she gave others an impression of trying to maintain a certain distance away from others.

"Kazuhiro-kun? A-am I not worthy of being your girlfriend?"

Her pupils, concealed by the thick lens glasses until just now, stared up at Kazuhiro from slightly below.

This was totally against the rules. It was way too dangerous.

Kazuhiro has been asked many times for "help" by girls with love affairs, but he usually ended up with the experience of receiving only a smile and a word of thanks. This kind of situation was a first.

"Um, mmhmm! Gladly! If you will have me, I'm happy!"

Kazuhiro nodded his head continuously.

Kazuhiro could not smile calmly as usual. His face started to twitch.

"Really... it's okay?"

"Yes! Yes! Definitely!"

Kazuhiro’s confirmations calmed Saotome, who sought for firm confirmations by repeated asking the same question.

"It's a deal. You won’t break the promise, right?"

"Certainly. S-Saotome!"

Kazuhiro subconsciously called out her name.

This was the development that Kazuhiro had longed for. There were many girls whom he could talk to in a relaxed fashion, but the only one he could directly call out the first name was his problematic childhood friend.

Ah, a girlfriend.

Kazuhiro often dreamed of having a girlfriend in his sweet dreams.

He finally got the girlfriend whom he has only dared to dream about.

He used to be "everyone's good guy". Now that was all in the past. His hard work has finally paid off.

And she was unexpectedly beautiful.

Just that—

A malicious smile curled up in the corner of this beautiful girl’s mouth.

This smile wasn’t one of happiness, nor was it one of joy.

This was not like a natural smile. The way her mouth curved gave off an ominous premonition.

"So, you agreed, and I have proof of that."

Saotome, who changed her tone in a flash, loosened her arms that had rested in front of her chest.

She took out a small recording pen that had been hidden. Then, she pressed the switch, and the red light, which indicated that the device was in recording mode, disappeared.

"Eh...? eeeeeeh?"

Kazuhiro was thrown into a state of confusion by the sudden development.

"Kazuhiro-kun said that, he wanted to be my fake boyfriend."

Saotome spoke to the recording pen in an affirmative tone.

"F-f-fake boyfriend? I thought you had said you wanted me to be your real boyfriend?”

Not surprised that Kazuhiro was in a state of panic, Saotome passed the earphones for the recording pen to him without uttering a word. She motioned for him to wear them, and proceeded to play the previously recorded conversation.

"Could you be my… (fake) boyfriend?"

Although at that time Kazuhiro didn’t hear the word, Saotome indeed uttered the word "fake" amidst the sentence.

The voice was very soft, but pronounced in an unmistakably fashion.

"You… you underhanded bitch!"

Angry about being deceived, Kazuhiro blurted out the words furiously.

Kazuhiro would not normally insult girls. However, he was quite far away from a state of tranquility right now.

"Kazuhiro-kun would never refuse a girl’s request. He would also not break an agreement with a girl. Is that so?"

"Of course not!"

"Kazuhiro-kun? Am I… not worthy of being your (fake) girlfriend?”

"Um, mmhmm! Gladly! If you will have me, I would be glad of service!"

"Really? Even a (fake) one, is that okay?"

"Yes! Yes, yes, of course!"

Kazuhiro had thought that Saotome was speaking with intermittent pauses because of being awfully embarrassed. In actuality, she was just using a minute voice to emphasize the word “fake”.

This was almost the equivalent of a demonic contract, in which the key words were written with extra small sized letters.

Is this a fraud?

Can I terminate the contract if that is so?

"There's more."

Saotome took out her cellphone. Of course, it was one that came with the camera-recording function.

Displayed on the small screen of cellphone was Kazuhiro, who was frantically rolling on the lawn.

“Aaaaaaaah! I really want a girlfriend!"

"Puu!"

Kazuhiro gargled at his own silly antics.

"I said it before. I was always taking special notice of you."

There was no turning back.

"W-what does a (fake) boyfriend mean?"

"It means what it means in a literal sense. Fake boyfriend and fake girlfriend. Don’t you get it?"

"I... I know that much at least. Though, why are you doing this?"

"I have my own reasons. There is something that I have to do." Saotome said with a resolute tone.

This girl… is she the kind of girl who addresses herself as “boku[1]”?

In class — rather, until just now, she was always referring to herself using the normal “I” that all girls use.

Unless, she had been pretending to act normal, and now she finally showed her true color?

"There is a reason for doing this. I must understand the complicated emotions of love. To achieve this, I must first have a boyfriend."

Absent-mindedly playing with her glasses in her right hand, Saotome said in a firm tone.

Kazuhiro wanted to inquire further, exactly why she did this. He thought better of it after concluding that any further questions would make him fall deeper into her plans.

However, it was worse to firmly decline an offer just because it was rather odd.

For example, if that voice record was spread among the girls, gossip such as

"Kazuhiro-kun is one who has gone too far and trampled over the feelings of a girl" would definitely appear.

Saotome, a girl who would record other people without them taking notice, might be capable of committing such an act.

Even though Kazuhiro was disgusted with his own “good guy” act, he was at least building a positive social image with his own efforts.

Even though Kazuhiro wanted to get away from the rank of being a “good guy”, he did not in the least want other people to think of him as a bad person.

Now, Saotome had a lethal weapon against him: the video of him rolling on the lawn while shouting “I want a girlfriend”.

Kazuhiro rescinded all of his ineffable gratefulness just a while ago.

There was no such thing as God in this world. No, if there wasn’t one, people’s fortunes could actually become more balanced.

Without a doubt, God existed in this world. He treated Kazuhiro as if Kazuhiro was a thorn in his eyes. God, please self-destruct right now!

"Have you thought it through? Kazuhiro-kun?"

Saotome suddenly moved closer to Kazuhiro.

Not good. This was quite different from the previous kind of "bad".

When she took off her glasses, Kazuhiro had thought Saotome was a beautiful girl. However, right now, in a close view, Saotome looked stunning.

Saotome was probably the most beautiful girl in the whole class… no, the whole school.

That wasn’t right. Saotome could be considered as a beauty even in the entertainment circle.

Hmm. It felt like that I had actually seen her on TV. Did I overthink a little?

Saotome, who commanded such beautiful appearance, was staring intensely at Kazuhiro from an extremely close distance. Kazuhiro could almost see the reflection of his own confused self in her eyes.

"Err, err... Why choose me?"

“Because of… a conclusion that I arrived at after some observations?"

Saotome smiled as she took one step closer toward Kazuhiro.

This time it wasn't a sinister smile, but a normal smile.

Her lips curved beautifully. Above those lips, there were a pair of serious eyes.

"Last year, since we have become classmates, I've always been paying close attention to Kazuhiro-kun."

If Kazuhiro hadn't been told that this was all a pretense, hearing this sentence would have made his heart jump twice in a beat.

"First, Kazuhiro-kun demonstrated a great talent in self-control, as well as being able to act really well. Even though Kazuhiro-kun wanted to have a girlfriend very badly, Kazuhiro-kun hid his true intentions and became normal friends with the girls."

"Don’t call this ‘wanting to have a girlfriend very badly’! For a man like me, this kind of desire should be normal!"

"Don't worry. Only I have noticed your true nature."

Kazuhiro felt relieved at first, but changed his mind very soon.

Put it in another way, Saotome has discovered Kazuhiro’s weakness, one that he didn’t want anyone to find out.

"Second, Kazuhiro-kun is interested in experiencing love. In other words, Kazuhiro-kun can help me to understand the emotions known as love. If Kazuhiro-kun is a bizarre creature who has no interest in love at all, I would have had no use for Kazuhiro-kun.

Saotome held up her fist, and put up her fingers one by one.

"Third, in order to help those female classmates, Kazuhiro-kun should be knowledgeable about those popular stores, right?"

Mm, that was true indeed.

If Kazuhiro changed his attitudes toward a girl whom he was helping just because she got a new boyfriend, he would be the subject of girls’ gossip.

Therefore, he gave those girls who already had boyfriend as much attention as those who didn’t have one.

If anybody asked him, he would provide the best route for a date, as well as all the related information that make a date successful.

Moreover, those girls’ boyfriends were either his friends, or his classmates. Kazuhiro didn’t want to be in bad terms with them.

If Kazuhiro has continued to conduct himself under this kind of strategy, the result would be spending his entire life as a “good person”, without a girlfriend.

At this precise moment, Kazuhiro started to doubt his strategy even more.

"Also, the fact that you live alone is also a plus. If you have a girlfriend, your parents would naturally know about it. Wouldn’t it become a nuisance when your parents find out that your girlfriend is actually a fake?"

Saotome seemed to know everything about him, including his family background, even if he didn’t exactly try to hide the information.

The ironic thing was, Kazuhiro has always been afraid of being branded as a stalker, so he never deeply investigated into any of the girl’s family background.

For a girl with few friends like Saotome, Kazuhiro knew next to nothing about her background.

"Due to the above reasons, I have concluded that Kazuhiro-kun is the best choice."

Saotome spun the recording pen in her hand several times, and threw it inside her breast pocket.

Not good.

It’s not that Kazuhiro didn’t consider the last option of forcibly taking the recording pen away from Saotome. However, he didn’t want to use force on a girl. Besides, in this kind of situation, it would be inevitable that he touch Saotome’s chest.

For Kazuhiro, touching a girl’s chest was a joyful event, but he thought better of it.

Because Saotome’s racks... her racks… were unexpectedly big.

Not a humongous size, but…

The size was just right. It was definitely a perfect size, not to mention that her breasts seemed very soft as well.

Kazuhiro only made this discovery just now. The concealing effect of unadorned glasses was something to reckon indeed.

American air force could also do with a pair of unadorned glasses.

"Where are you looking at...? Kazuhiro-kun is a pervert☆"

Saotome shielded her chest with with her hands, and turned to the side ninety degrees.

And once again Saotome stared at Kazuhiro from below with her eyes opened widely.

"Aaaaaa… Whoaaaaa!"

Kazuhiro panicked due to Saotome's unexpected reactions.

That was against the rules. Definitely against the rules.

This kind of expression, this kind of posture, and her sweet voice…

Who care if this was only a pretense? If a girl this cute asked you to be her boyfriend, what was there to hesitate about?

"Birurururururu!"

Kazuhiro's cellphone began to ring inside his pocket.

"Yagimoto-kun, what happened? Caught a cold?"

"S-sorry! There's something urgent! I'm going there right now!"

Kazuhiro answered the high-pitched loli with a short sentence, and immediately hung up the call.

Today was a work day. He has completely forgotten.

It was already time for work, but he forgot about it due to Saotome's interruption.

"Ahhh, I still have work to do! I work in a café, twice a week. Today I have to work!"

Kazuhiro clasped both of his hands together in front of Saotome, as a gesture of apology.

"No! You can't go yet!"

Saotome extended both of her arms, and wrapped them tightly around Kazuhiro’s hand.

Warm, and soft.

If that previous expression could have gotten a red card, this one was definitely a weapon of mass destruction.

Her moist eyes could charm any man.

She gently stared at Kazuhiro, as if she was trying to persuade a warrior going to the front line to stay.

"Unless you agree to be my fake boyfriend, I won’t let you go."

The words that came out of Saotome sounded like a request that could not be turned down.

"I, I know! I agree! I agree to be your fake boyfriend! Is that okay?"

Work could not wait, and since Saotome was so cute, it didn’t matter whether she was my real or fake girlfriend.

Even though it was a little bit suspicious, it was still better to accept it.

This kind of logic isn't wrong, right?

"OK. Good luck with working. Don't be late for work☆"

Saotome finally let go of Kazuhiro’s hand, and waved her right arm as she said those words of encouragement. Kazuhiro took this opportunity to immediately exit the scene.

After taking several steps, Kazuhiro turned his head to look at the previous scene. Saotome was still standing there, waving her hand at him.

Part 2[edit]

Kyuuhito City is located in the western part of outskirts of Tokyo. In the past, it had been known as a bustling area where the eminent nobles lived. Perhaps it was because of the historical legacy, the area around the metro station was quite lively.

Beside the main road was a commercial building. Kazuhiro’s workplace was a café located on the first floor of this building. Although he was part of the crew who worked mainly in the kitchen, he occasionally had to work as a waiter. Thus, he was obligated to change into the uniform.

Kazuhiro sprinted toward the storage room, aka employee lounge.

“Pataaaa!”

The door to the employee lounge was unlocked, and was opened with a light shove.

“Kyaa!”

The sound of a girl shrieking came from inside the room.

It was Kazuhiro’s colleague, Sanae Tenkyuuin, who was changing her clothes.

Her snow-white skin contrasted strongly against her black hair. The radiant sight of her white bra and underwear flew into Kazuhiro’s vision.

“Ah, I am sorry for shouting out loud… no, I should have locked the door properly. I was entirely my fault...”

“Well, let’s just forget about this... whooahh!”

Sanae first covered her mouth with her hands, and then apologized by bowing down her body. Seeing this scene, Kazuhiro covered both of his eyes with his left hand, for the sake of being polite, while waving his right hand in panic.

He knew that the best solution would be exiting the scene promptly, but both because of the exhaustion from dashing earlier and the shock induced by the sudden turn of the events, he couldn’t command his feet.

“I’m really very sorry… eh? Are you not feeling well?”

From the gap between his fingers, he could see Sanae gradually approaching him with a worried look on her face.

Only the underwear and the bra were present on her slim body.

“The clothes! I am going out now! Please wear them quickly!”

In a hurry, Kazuhiro got down on all fours, crawled out of the room, and closed the door. After patiently waiting for a while, Kazuhiro heard sounds of knocking from inside the door.

“Yagimoto-san, I’m done changing. Could you open the door please?”

“Eh? Ahh, my bad.”

Kazuhiro blocked the door by resting his back on it, so Sanae couldn’t open the door. He shifted his weight from the door and turned the knob.

“Thank you for waiting.”

Sanae, who had changed into her uniform, walked out of the room.

She wore an elegant black dress with a laced apron in white. She wore a pair of gloves with butterfly-knots, and white headwear on her head.

This was the place two of them worked, “Sweet Drop”, a maid café.

Although the impression that Sanae gave off could be described as that of a traditional Japanese women, this appearance also suited her.

Once there was nobody left in the room, Kazuhiro started to change. What he had to wear was obviously not a maid costume. It was a butler costume with a white shirt under a vest, together with a pair of long pants.

After getting changed, Kazuhiro headed toward the kitchen, right at the moment when Sanae was about to press on the power button of an ice-maker machine.

“Yagimoto-san, are you okay? I am going to offer you some iced water.”

“Ah! Be careful—”

Kazuhiro warned her, but it was to no avail.

“Pssshhaaaaa!”

Sanae pressed down on the "PUSH" button. A large quantity of ice cubes and iced water flowed out of the machine at an alarming rate, even though one would have thought that only ice cubes could come out from the machine.

"eh? eeeeh?"

As a result from the water that was sprayed out from the machine, Sanae's clothes was wet.

"Qu-quickly, watch out!"

Kazuhiro directed the confused Sanae away from the disastrous scene. He randomly pressed the buttons on the machine, but the ice-maker showed no sign of stopping.

Finally, Kazuhiro unplugged the electrical cord, successfully halting the machine from its rampage.

"Ms. Tenkyuuin, I thought I had warned you of the dangers of being near electrical devices for people who are not good with them."

"I am really sorry. Yagimoto-san seemed to be very tired, so I wanted to quickly offer you a glass of iced water. I forgot about your warning..."

Sanae bowed deeply as she finished her words. Her gorgeous body was suddenly exposed. Kazuhiro found it hard to look away from this view.

Her white shirt, tightly glued on her skin due to the wetness, was visible. Kazuhiro could see the complicated lace pattern on her snow-white skin.

This scene was definitely not good for the eyes.

However, if one asked him whether he was pleased to see such a view, the answer should be obvious.

“Ahh, it’s all wet… what should I do…?”

Sanae was at a loss of what to do next. All the while, water drips were constantly slipping off from her fingers.

“I am really… how did it come to this…? I really need to wipe this place clean.”

“I will take care of here. Just go and change. There should be unused uniforms, right?”

Sanae’s appearance could seriously damage my eyes, and she might get a cold. Moreover, she couldn’t serve the guests if her body was wet like this.

Sanae was a clueless girl. If Kazuhiro didn’t tell her what to do clearly, she might even continue cleaning the place with her body still dripping wet.

"O-ok, then I will heed your advice."

After Sanae left, Kazuhiro restarted the ice-maker. This time, he followed the instructions on the menu, supplying only ice cubes.

Sanae was a clueless person when it came to electronic devices, to a drastic extent. If we use a metaphor with singers, she was on the same level as fat O. One couldn't say whether it was because of her body composition or her special skills, but whether she liked it or not, machines would definitely malfunction if she came to touch with them.

Any device associated with electricity or involved pressing buttons would not do. As far as Kazuhiro knew, she didn't even own a cellphone.

"I hope you didn't wait too long."

After Kazuhiro cleaned the whole mess up, Sanae reappeared, in her clean uniform.

"Wa!"

Her new uniform was quite different from the last one. The short skirt couldn't be shorter, and there was a huge V neckline on her chest, revealing much of her assets. She only slightly dried her hair, retaining the watery look. She looked like as if she was sparkling.

"Ms. Ten… Tenkyuuin?"

At this moment, Sanae wore a dangerously revealing cos-play costume, and had a cute face.

This kind of combination was more threatening than the previous, water-drenched look.

"I asked manager Tomo, and she said that she didn't have any other uniform to spare. She told me to wear this."

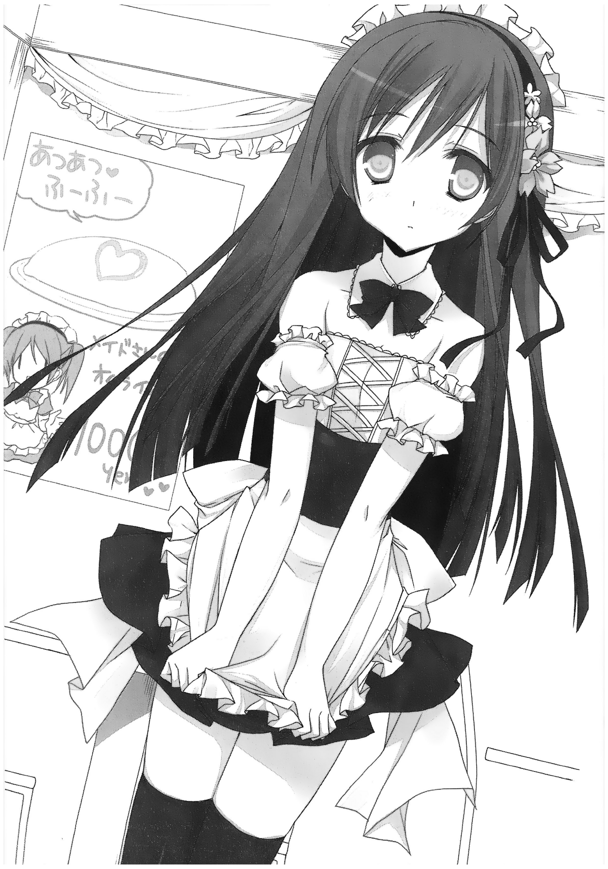
"That woman is always like this…"

The uniform Sanae was wearing must be the uniform for night and holiday shift. In "Sweet Drop", Tenkyuuin was the only maid who still went to high school. The other three were either university students or full-time workers.

“So what’s up…?”

Sanae was confused about why Kazuhiro was panicking, and she slightly tilted her head.

“An… anyways, don’t worry about me. The guests are waiting. You should hurry up.”


あっあっ♥
ふーふー
メイドさん
yen

“Ok, I understand.”

This restaurant wasn’t a maid café in the beginning.

Until last year, this restaurant was operated by the current manager, Oofuna Tomo’s grandfather. The café was named “Purely for Drinking Tea – Honeydew”

Manager Tomo’s grandfather was an amazing coffee brewer, securing a large customer base. He was forced to retire due to old age, though. The one who inherited the café, Tomo, knew next to nothing about cooking.

Thus, Kazuhiro, who just happened to be searching for a job at that time, was tasked with the mission of brewing coffee.

Grinding coffee beans and brewing coffee were not difficult tasks for Kazuhiro, but he could never make coffee that tasted as refined as ones made by the previous manager.

Deprived of all but one choice, manager Tomo renovated the shop into a maid café altogether. The desperate gamble worked out somehow.

Even though the coffee shop was turned into a maid café, Kazuhiro remained as one of the employees.

If anybody else knew that Kazuhiro was working in a maid café, one would definitely be envious of his position. That was why Kazuhiro told all of his friends that he was working in a coffee shop. Besides, it was a coffee shop to start with.

Maid café didn’t have a strict requirement for the menu, nor the quality of food. The manager chose simple menus, and Kazuhiro, who was in charge of the kitchen, had a lot of free time to himself.

While Kazuhiro was busy brewing coffee and oolong tea, he heard a trail of footsteps.

“Ya-Yagimoto!”

The person who was sprinting toward Kazuhiro was manager Tomo. Manager Tomo had a babyish face, a short statue, couple with short hair. She looked like a middle school student, but she was in fact well passed her twentieth birthday. If one had to ask her exact age, manager Tomo would bawl like a kid, even though she was already an adult.

“I… I want to tell you… there was a guest…”

It was always hard to catch Tomo’s main point from her speech. Though, judging from her troubled expression and the way she sprinted here, some problems must have arisen.

“Alright, tell me your mailbox.”

“Ehh… so… what is a mailbox?”

“I like this kind of reaction, very similar to that of a rich lady. I am of course talking about the email address for cellphone.”

“But… I don’t have a cellphone.”

“In this day and age, what kind of person doesn’t have a cellphone? Did the employee regulation at this place tell you to treat a guest like this?”

After stepping into the guest area, it immediately dawned to him that Sanae was being harassed by a male customer.

Her hand was tightly locked by the customer. Her eyebrow was furrowed.

“Seeing the daring way you dressed today makes me want to see you in some other places.”

Perhaps because there weren’t any other customer in the shop, the man’s attitude was quite intimate.

“Sir, if you behave like this, we would be very troubled.”

Kazuhiro stepped forward, and grabbed the man’s hand.

“This shop doesn’t offer that kind of service. If you keep harassing our employee, I am going to call the police!”

Kazuhiro didn’t have a massive build. However, as the only male employee in the shop, he was the only one who could handle this situation.

For this kind of customer, most of them would back down after a bit of warning.

“O-ok, don’t be like this. I was only joking.”

The man showed a fake smile, and promptly left the shop as he paid the bill.

“Thank you for your help.”

Perhaps it was because the man left, Sanae’s expressions were more relaxed.

“It’s only part of my job. The next time somebody harass you, just shout right away.”

“There are a lot that I don’t understand in the outside world. I really don’t know how to deal with that sort of people…”

Sanae didn’t have a phone because it would break if it came into contact with her. Even though this seemed like an exaggeration, it really looked like that Sanae was a spoiled girl from a rich family who has never seen the outside world.

In fact, Kazuhiro heard that Sanae started her work half a month earlier, because she wanted to learn about social experiences.

“Yagimoto-san is really dependable. I am lucky with you as my senpai.”

“Not at all, haha…”

That feeling when one was looked up upon by a pair of moist eyes… that kind of feeling wasn’t bad at all.

Subsequently, nothing irregular happened. When the night shift employees arrived, Kazuhiro’s work was done.

“So… Yagimoto-san…”

Sanae, dressed in her uniform, suddenly called up Kazuhiro, who was preparing to go home.

She didn’t wear her maid uniform. Rather, she was dressed in her school’s sailor uniform.

“Yep? What’s wrong?”

“I know it is disrespectful for me to say this, but there is one thing that I must ask of you, because I can only ask Yagimoto-san…”

Kazuhiro recalled that Sanae had said that she wanted to ask him of something.

“I said it before. I would glad help with anything I am capable of.”

At that instance, Saotome’s request flashed in Kazuhiro’s mind.

Could it be? That kind of rare request, surely it couldn’t be that again?

“I haven’t known Yagimoto-san for very long, yet I have asked this of you… it is really shameful…”

Sanae’s cheeks turned red. She bowed her head in embarrassment, and concentrated on playing with her fingers in front of her chest.

Finally, she made up her mind, and raised her head to look at Kazuhiro.

“Yagimoto-san, please become my lover!”

“What?”

What kind of development was this?

The super cute coworker suddenly confessing to him?

No, Kazuhiro would be lying to himself if he said he wasn't wishing for this result. Nevertheless, nothing good would come out of this, so he wouldn't even dare to dream of this in normal circumstances.

But now, is has become true!

Kazuhiro's spring was finally about to come!

The hours that Kazuhiro spent here working was all worth it!

"Of cou—"

Just as Kazuhiro was about to say "of course", he suddenly stopped himself.

He was already Saotome's boyfriend, wouldn't he be cheating if he promised to date another girl?

That would not do. It was scary to be caught between two women. Girls wouldn't like it either.

But, he wasn't dating Saotome in the real sense.

So strictly, it wouldn't be cheating.

After going through the reasoning, Kazuhiro smiled.

"So… I think there is some misunderstandings…? I am not referring to really dating each other. I meant dating only as a formality…"

"What?"

"I have my own reasons, so I need a person to pretend to be my boyfriend."

This was an unexpected answer. It was in fact unbelievable.

Consecutively, two girls wanted me to pretend to be their boyfriend?

If I were to refuse, I must take order of sequence into considerations.

Since I agreed to Saotome's request first, but I have already agreed even earlier to help Sanae…

"Please!"

The tone was not anything like that of Sanae. It was tense. Her slim hands tightly clutched Kazuhiro's arm.

Kazuhiro could feel her soft and warm skin on his arm. The warm sensation was first transmitted to his arm, and then moved toward his chest, finally arrived at his brain.

"Wa! Waaaa!"

Even if they were coworkers, should they really touch each other intimately like this?

"I don't have any male friend. Please, Yagimoto-san…"

Kazuhiro couldn't do it. He couldn't refuse her.

He couldn't refuse her after she showed so much sincerity.

The grip on his arm tightened, dealing the fatal strike.

"Sure. If I could be of any help…"

After all, they were "fake".

One, or two, it didn't make much of a difference.

"Thank you, Yagimoto-san! Ahh… I am… please excuse my behaviors."

Sanae realized that her behavior was quite out of line, and released her hold on Kazuhiro.

After telling Kazuhiro that she would fill him in later, she departed.

Kazuhiro had planned to walk her home, and ask her more about this request. However, Sanae said that "someone will pick her up", and refused his kind offer.

Part 3[edit]

What kind of development was this? Two people asking me for the same favor on the same day?

In normal situation, Kazuhiro wouldn't cheat on his girlfriend. However, both girls asked him to be their "fake" boyfriend.

Furthermore, one girl was his classmate, while the other was his coworker. The time and place for rendezvous were completely different, so it should be fine.

Lost in thought, Kazuhiro has already arrived at his home.

This spring, Kazuhiro’s sister and mother moved, following their father who had gotten a notice for job relocation. Kazuhiro lived in home alone after that.

When Kazuhiro checked the mailbox, he found a note, ripped off from notebook.

Only one word was written on it. That was, “food”.

“Sigh… here it comes again…”

Kazuhiro walked into his house dejectedly. He checked the fridge as he entered the kitchen.

Even though Kazuhiro could manage housework pretty well, he was still just a high school boy. There wasn’t much food in the fridge.

Kazuhiro swiftly cooked the previously frozen rice, cut ham, and vegetables. He poured scrambled egg over it, and covered it upside down with plastic wrap. Next, he brought it over to his neighbor.

He pressed the doorbell, but no one came out.

He turned the knob with his left hand.

“Talk about not being careful enough… the one who is in a life-threatening situation is the thief.”

“Sorry for intruding.”

Kazuhiro walked in without waiting for a response. He climbed up the stairs to the second floor.

On the second floor, there was one room that was on the direct opposite side of Kazuhiro’s room, where one could exchange words with the person living on the other side easily through the windows. He stopped at the door, and knocked on it.

Nobody replied.

“I am going to open the door!”

Kazuhiro proclaimed, and lightly turned the knob.

He found a girl lying on the bed.

This kind of situation would definitely be enticing no matter how one looked at it.

However, Kazuhiro was already accustomed to this scene.

The girl wasn’t wearing any cute pajama, nor sexy underclothes. She was wearing a loose, dark red colored sports jersey from her high school.

Not only that, saliva was dripping from the corner of her mouth. Her medium length hair was disheveled, and she was snoring.

She was Kazuhiro’s childhood friend. For most guys, having a younger female childhood friend who lived just next door almost was a dream come true.

Kazuhiro wished these people could see the harsh reality.

A female childhood friend… this kind of vocabulary did not guarantee the quality that it implied.

If Kazuhiro was forced to enumerate a few of her merits, he could only say that maybe her face was kind of… cute. Also, her body, while short in statue, was well-curved.

That being said, in reality, the sheer numbers of shortcomings could overwhelm the few merits that she had.

For example, in the center of her room, there was a sand bag, which shouldn’t belong to any normal high school girl.

The decorations in the room consisted of trophies and medals from karate competitions. The only thing that could go together with the word cute was the designs on her quilt. The room was not to Kazuhiro’s liking. It was beyond what a sports enthusiast’s room should look like.

“Yo, Takana, Takana Hio. It’s time for a meal.”

After attempting to wake her up for several times, there was still no response.

Kazuhiro tipped his toes and lightly approached the bed.

“…mmmm……”

The girl’s eyelids slowly opened.

Even though her head should still be in the sleep mode, her arms and feet shot out like a bolt of lightning.

“Waa!”

Kazuhiro jumped backward in a hurry. The girl’s spin kick ended up landing on the sand bag.

“Boom!”

As a result of the momentum from the kick, the sandbag swung all the way to crash into the ceiling, shaking the entire room as an aftershock.

“Waaaaaa! Idiot! Wake up! It’s me, Kazuhiro! I am here to bring you some food!”

Kazuhiro took off the plastic wrap in a hurry, and started to fan the food with his hands. He employed the last resort of trying to wake Takana up with the smell of the food.

“……ahh… it’s Kazu…”

The young maiden rubbed her half-closed eyes, and then quickly sorted out her hair with her hands. Finally, she tied up her hair into a horse tail.

“Don’t ‘it’s Kazu’ me! Don’t you think it’s about time to change your habit of ‘assaulting any person who tries to wake you up while you are asleep’? It’s dangerous!”

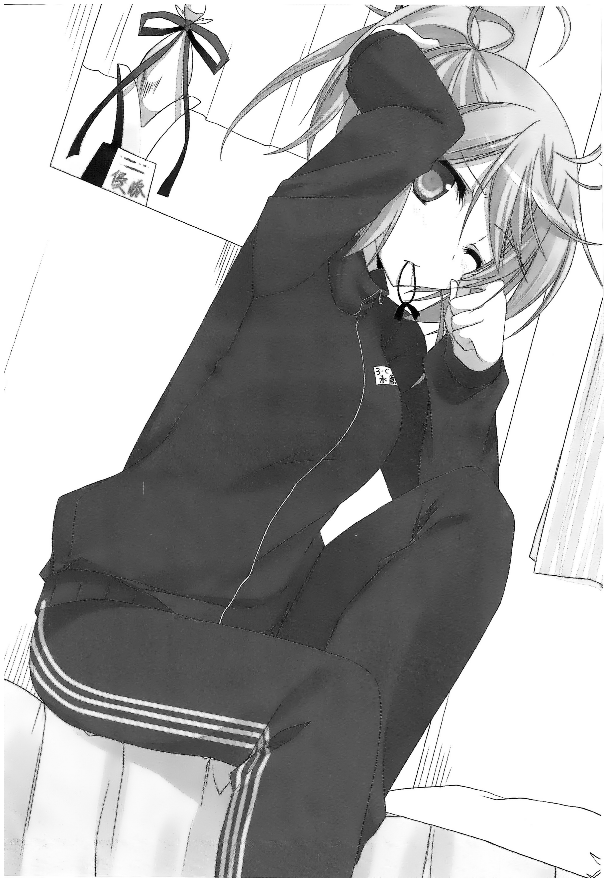
“Ehh, it’s a martial artist’s habit. When danger is imminent, my body just instinctively react.”

“A normal human being isn’t a threat! Please don’t wave your wild fists, which has the ability to knock out a wild bear, at people while you are sleeping ever again!”

“Knocking out a wild bear” was not an exaggeration.

Takana used a school of martial art called “Hio Metsu Jinryuu”, or Hio God-destroying Style. As the next head of the dojo, she was hailed as a genius who would only appear once a hundred years.

When she was only seven years old, she has already learned Hio God-destroying Style. She easily defeated her father, who taught her the art. During a Hokkaido trip in elementary school, she got out of the hotel during the middle of the night, and actually defeated a wild bear.



At that time, the only witness, who was practically dragged into the action, was Kazuhiro. To Kazuhiro, however, that was only an inconvenience.

The sandbag was still swinging like a pendulum. It was a custom made training product. For normal practitioners of martial arts, punching this sandbag would make their fists hurt like hell.

Currently, Takana sat on her bed in a cross-leg position. She had a mouthful of fried rice in her mouth.

This scene could perhaps be interpreted as healthy, but it absolutely had nothing to do with beautiful or cute.

Even though she was like this, she attended the famous all-girls school, the Academy of St. Sky, a school full of rich young ladies. Kazuhiro heard from rumors that she only got in because of special enrollment for martial artists, so her grades were horrible.

“Emmm, Kazu’s fried rice is superb. It’s amazing that you can cook such amazing food with such a simple name[2].”

“What does cooking have to do with a name?”

Takana smiled contentedly, with a grain of rice still on the corner of her mouth.

Shouldn’t it be the opposite in normal circumstances?

The girl was the childhood friend who lived next door. The boy lived by himself.

Normally, the girl should cook for the boy. In reality, Kazuhiro always prepared the food for Takana.

Th…thi…this was the reality of having a female childhood friend!

“Today I have work, so I ate outside… please remind me again why did I cook for someone else as soon as I got home?”

Even though Kazuhiro was used to the routine, he has never forgotten to complain a little bit.

“It’s not ‘someone else’. My relationship with Kazu run deeper than that, right?”

“It’s definitely ‘someone else’. You are specially related to me.”

Although Kazuhiro has known Takana since he was little, she was neither his family nor his girlfriend. Granted that Kazuhiro’s family took care of her a lot in the past since her parents were busy with the dojo, so she could be considered as part of his family.

Besides, it was not just once or twice that he almost lost his life going along with Takana’s adventures.

That said, it was a miracle that Kazuhiro was still alive up to now, since angering her on accident could mean a certain death from deathly punches.

This girl might not even be a human being.

She must have mutated into the strongest creature, Homo Takana-ensis Violence. Exactly, that must be what happened.

“Last time, you said you wanted me to do a favor. Were you talking about the food?”

Kazuhiro was called up by Takana in the morning, being told that Takana wanted a favor from him.

“Nah.”

Takana took a few swigs from the sport drinks, which usually sit by her side. She wiped her mouth as she was finished drinking.

“It can’t be… that? Asking me to be your fake boyfriend or something crazy like that?”

Right after he finished his sentence, he thought that it was a really silly idea. He made a wry expression.

Takana didn’t know about the incidents today in which he was asked by two girls to be their fake boyfriends. Anyways, dating was not her style. It was like Mona Lisa and pickled radish. They weren’t compatible with each other.

“It seems like you have a good talent at guessing.”

“Ahh?”

“Kazu, be my boyfriend. Of course, we are only acting.”

Having realized that she got a grain of rice stuck on the corner of her mouth, Takana picked it up with her finger tips, and threw it into her mouth.

“Whhh…aaat?”

“Don’t misunderstand. I am not asking you to be my real boyfriend. We are only pretending.”

Ms. Takana was a person who did not give a shit about the receiving party’s emotions and thoughts.

It was a unilateral demand, one that was immune from any protest.

If he said “no”, it did not take a wild imagination to predict that a flying iron fist would soon come his way.

“Ha…hahaha……”

Even though he has reached a state where he could no longer laugh, he still had no other choice than letting the laughter out loud.

The request for fake boyfriend… and he was asked to do it three times all in one day.

The kind of bad luck that only he would get, getting asked multiple times to become a girl’s fake boyfriend.

If a guy was confessed to three times consecutively by different girls, it was a matter that demanded utmost attention and would bring endless worries. However, being asked to be a fake boyfriend three times consecutively was not a turnout that make a guy happy. Actually, only the part that would bring endless worries remained.

References[edit]

1. ↑ In Japanese, "boku" is commonly used by male to refer to themselves.
2. ↑ Kazuhiro's name in kanji means "one" and "big", respectively.

Chapter 2: Congratulations, Our Kazuhiro-kun

Part 1[edit]

Even if the situation had become quite complicated, the development turned out to be fake, so it was okay.

There was also one thing that Kazuhiro was really grateful for. It was kind of bizarre to think of it this way, but the three girls would meet with Kazuhiro in different settings.

Kazuhiro would meet Sanae during work, Takana at home, and Saotome in school. Since Kazuhiro would meet these girls during different times of day, the development was still salvageable.

There should be no problem with him meeting the three of them at the same time, turning into a complete harem hell.

Wait, if the whole thing was fake, they wouldn't fight over him, right?

Still early in the morning, Kazuhiro sat in the classroom while resting his chin on his hand propped up on the desk, pondering these problems.

"Morning, Kazuhiro!"

Hearing his name called, Kazuhiro turned his head.

He immediately felt a force against his back, something really soft.

"Waaaaaaaaaaa!"

The person who hugged him was no one other than Saotome.

Not to mention, she appeared along with a super stunning look.

To be exact, she didn't change her appearance much. She took off her glasses, decorated her pony tail with headwear (instead of a simple rubber band) and dressed into her tidy school uniform in a slightly different fashion. These small changes made her look both chic and cute.

"Who… who is she? Do such a cute girl exist in our school?!"

“Kazuhiro! Please introduce her!”

Having seen the stunning beauty who made her sudden entry, all the boys in the classroom were stirred into a frenzy.

“S-she is Hoshikawa! Hoshikawa!”

“Kazuhiro, don’t speak in such an unfamiliar manner. ‘I’ thought we had agreed to be in a first-name basis?” Saotome, who had turned off her hugging mode, was smiling as she tilted her head.

“Yeah… sorry about that. Sao… Saotome.”

Kazuhiro did not recall about being in first-name basis, only that he must pretend to be her boyfriend.

That’s why he had to play along with her.

It couldn’t be helped that they call each other by first name. Still, it was pretty embarrassing to call a girl by her first name.

Takana was the only exception. Kazuhiro had known her long before she became a women, so she didn’t count.

“Saotome is so cute!”

“Did you change your style?”

Not only was male members of the class interested, but the girls were also curious about Saotome’s transformation.

Miki, from yesterday’s incident, was also part of the crowd.

“Of course, since Kazuhiro said that he likes girls who are good-looking.” Saotome said with a mortified expression. Her face was turning red.

“It is as I suspected, that Saotome was a jewel yet to be polished, the kind of jewel that would become brilliant after polishing!”

“Tell us. Who confessed first?”

Saotome (and Kazuhiro) was soon surrounded by the girls in their class.

Love affairs were definitely a topic that girls were most interested in.

“‘I’… ‘I’ confessed first. He caught my attention since long before, and ‘I’ always thought he was a gentle person… a fantastic man.”

“Oohh! Saotome, you are quite the daring one!”

“So the way that you behaved yourself before was not you at all?”

Upon hearing Saotome’s response, the girls were becoming more and more excited.

“Everyone, do not be fooled by her!” Kazuhiro desperately shouted in his mind.

This girl was indeed constantly hiding her true self. Nevertheless, the current Saotome was far from being the real her.

The real Saotome was a girl who was extremely cunning and deceptive! She was the same as the kind of fraud organization who would use recording tapes of other people’s embarrassing secrets to extort to its advantage.

Even when she referred to herself, she would never use such words like “I”[1].

“Hmmm. Yagimoto is indeed a kind and gentle person.”

“Actually we were all worried about Yagimoto-kun. He was so kind to every one of us. He should also be in a relationship with one of the girls.”

“Yeah. Yagimoto is a gentleman, and always carries on in a low-key fashion.”

Chiang!

The undeniable truth was unfolded in front of Kazuhiro.

Because he was afraid of being hated by girls for being too clingy, he chose to conduct himself in such a low-key fashion.

If he had been more aggressive, he would have gotten a girlfriend ages ago!

These furious thoughts could only be hidden in the deep recess of his mind.

If he screamed these inner thoughts out by accident, he could have ruined all of his efforts up to now. Moreover, that would be really disrespectful toward Saotome, who was currently his girlfriend, though not for real.

“Yagi, you have to treasure Saotome-chan.”

“Uh-oh, after all you just got a girlfriend.”

“For the sake of your boyfriend, you strived to become more beautiful. That’s the way to go!”

Yagi, Yagimoto… even though quite a few girls were familiar enough with Kazuhiro to call him by those names, the only one who would call him “Kazuhiro” was Saotome.

Among the girls’ banter, class began, and soon it was time for lunch.

Although Kazuhiro cooked for himself, he did not have the motivation to get out of bed early and make his bento. That was why he ate at the school cafeteria during lunch. As he was about to head toward the cafeteria like usual…

“Kazuhiro, ‘I’ made the bento for you. Do you want to eat together on the roof? Saotome said as she stopped in front of Kazuhiro.

She carried a small, cute bag in her hands.

“Eh? Ehh—”

Suddenly, whistles resounded the entire classroom.

“That won’t do. This is Yagi and Saotome’s sweet lunch time!”

“Don’t disturb the couple! Go for it, Saotome!”

The girls formed a defensive line with their bodies, blocking the boys who wanted to make a fuss.

“Thank you, guys. ‘I’ owe you one.” Saotome bowed, and held on to Kazuhiro’s hand.

Compared to yesterday’s Sanae, Saotome’s hand felt warmer.

Because Saotome wouldn’t let go of his hand, Kazuhiro was led all the way to the rooftop.

This was a venue that had a panoramic view. It was also a windy place, and even the coming of spring could not help that fact.

Calling the rooftop a place where only those in the know knew of its goodness was not quite accurate. In fact, this was a secret hideout only because of the lack of visitors who would frequent this area.

“There is no one here. We can relax.”

Saotome spread out the picnic mat that she brought along, and promptly sat on it.

No longer using “I” to refer to herself, it looked like had Saotome cast off her fake shell.

“Why are you standing there like that? You can sit down.”

It was quite awkward to remain in a standing position, so Kazuhiro decided to obediently sit down beside Saotome. The picnic mat was really small, and a small lapse in concentration could result in a knee clash with the other occupant of the mat.

“Ah…”

Saotome cried out softly, and curled up her body.

“Oh, I am really sorry.”

Kazuhiro maintained more distance between them and sat down again. As a result, half of his body rested on the hard, cold concrete floor. It wasn’t a comfortable position.

“You were very enthusiastic to hug me and hold my hand earlier. Why are you hesitating now?”

“I don’t mind touching others… but this kind of contact is not okay…”

Kazuhiro half-joked half seriously struck up the conversation, but Saotome replied in a serious tone.

It looked like even though it was only an act, he needed to be careful not to touch Saotome too much, and maintain a certain distance in order to not touch her.

“Here you go, your bento.”

“Oh, right. Thanks for the meal.”

Kazuhiro opened the bento box.

One of the boxes contained white rice, and the other had a fried egg with vegetables, dry-braised prawn, and mini-tomato salad. These were Kazuhiro’s favorite food.

"You eat in the school cafeteria every day, and often order Chinese food, right? I guessed that you would like these. Am I right?"

She had investigated this far?

It… couldn't be that?

That she was actually in love with me, and being a fake boyfriend was just a pretext.

"Delicious! Did you make these by yourself? For me?"

Surely a girl wouldn't spend this much effort only for a fake boyfriend?

There was no one on the roof. If she was acting, there was no audience.

Without a doubt, this was—

"I wanted to investigate about what kind of food a boy would like, and then experience the happiness when he dug into the food with a satisfied expression. That's why I already looked into everything when I chose my fake boyfriend."

Saotome's attitude was quite different than when she was in the classroom. Her tone was cold.

"… So this is all fake?"

"Of course."

Her reply was icy, as icy as if she just poured a jug of freezing water on Kazuhiro's overheated head.

Right, good to know.

Kazuhiro would not ever expect anything out of this relationship again. His hypothesis, that perhaps she asked him to be her fake boyfriend while actually being in love with him, was just a fantasy.

After all, God liked to make him miserable, to play cruel pranks on him.

"It is really delicious. Thank you."

That was true.

"We need to be a couple in reputation, so the first thing that we have to do is act like one in class. We need to convey the idea that we are a lovey-dovey couple. That is why I made the bento. It is an essential part of dating.”

“I was really surprised by your act. Isn’t it overkill?”

Kazuhiro decided to hide the fact that he felt good after being hugged by a girl from behind. It was kind of embarrassing as well.

“Was it really overkill?”

“Even if some couples become idiotic when dating and no longer care about what other people think, Hoshikawa-san…”

“Saotome.”

“Ah?”

“Please call me Saotome. I can easily switch from I and ‘I’, but you probably can’t do the same as well as I can. You have to get used to calling me by my first name, or else you could make a mistake someday.”

“Ok… so, Saotome.”

“What?”

Kazuhiro mustered his courage and called out her name, but Saotome replied in an uninterested manner.

“Until yesterday, you were a plain girl, who did not gather any attention from others. You suddenly became so daring today, doesn’t it seem unnatural?”

“When girls fall in love, they would naturally become daring, no?”

“But such a tremendous transformation! This is not a manga.”

“Oh... so my performance was unnatural... it seems that I still need a lot of practice.”

The expression on Saotome’s face was not a wry smile, but rather one of self-derision.

“Whatever. The only way forward is keep up the daring act. If I suddenly become shy, it could appear even more unnatural... ah!”

Out of the blue, Kazuhiro recalled an important matter.

“If we are already dating...”

“Pretending to date each other. Don’t make a mistake on that.” Saotome shook her fingers at Kazuhiro as she corrected him.

“Since nobody knew of our secret, everybody would think that we are a real couple, right?”

“Yeah, that’s true. So?”

“That is to say, I am no longer single, and I am no longer in the potential boyfriend candidates list of any girl in our school. As long as we pretend to date each other, I won’t find myself a girlfriend. Is that true?”

“Lol. You just found out?” Saotome said with a treacherous smile, and her hand slowly moved toward the hidden recording pen.

“Sigh... If I had known, I wouldn’t have agreed to your request...”

Kazuhiro had just found out that he could have easily gotten a girlfriend if he had been a little bit more aggressive, and the ironic thing was that he was only able to find out precisely because he became Saotome’s fake boyfriend.

“Why not give it up?” Saotome suggested as she nibbled on the bento, which was one size smaller than Kazuhiro’s.

“Can I ask you a question? Why do you want to have a fake boyfriend?”

Given that this was a goal that required meticulous planning, she couldn’t have just decided to do this without reason.

As a fellow actor, who was coerced into the role, he had the right to know why.

Saotome’s face was shadowed by a veil.

“I won’t force you to spit it out. However, it would be easier for me to cooperate as well if I just know more about it. At least, don’t I have the right to know how long do we have to keep up the act?”

If the reason was simple, she would have explained earlier. The fact that she didn’t talk about it at first meant that it was hard to talk about it, or that she never intended to share her reasons. If that was so, it was best that he didn’t pursue too deeply.

“Fine, I’ll tell you. It’s only fair that you know.” Saotome closed the lid on the bento box, and stood up slowly.

“I am a professional.”

She spoke in a resolute, clear voice.

“Professional... what?”

It couldn’t be... some sort of dating agency?

That couldn’t be... that sort of thing didn’t exist.

“I am an actor, a professional voice actor. I have three fixed shows every week.”

Even if Kazuhiro was only a casual gamer, he played video games and watched anime during leisure time. He has never heard of the name Hoshikawa.

Such a name would draw his attention immediately.

“I used a stage name, such as ‘the travel of smiling forest’, ‘dear baby’, and ‘curious experiments’.”

Saotome proudly counted out her stage names, and the programs that she participated in.

Kazuhiro has never heard of these programs.

“One of them is a late-night family show. The other two are educational shows. It’s normal that you haven’t heard of them.”

Indeed, those shows also needed voice actors.

Though, it was a serious waste of talent.

Recently, female voice actors who have only started to gather some popularity would show their faces in public, trading for jobs like gravure models or singers.

If only Saotome was willing to take off her glasses, she could have found herself loads of jobs with her pretty face, such as those shows that hardcore anime fans loved.

“Previously I only participated in child educational programs, but my agency wanted me to gain some experience, and asked me to challenge myself in characters that correspond to my age. Then, I would have a much higher chance of encountering male voice actors. Thus, I need to be familiar with dating and relationships.”

“So I'm just for target practice?”

“Yeah. I don’t want to give up this job. That’s why I need to work harder and overcome all obstacles.”

A gust of wind passed by, sweeping up Saotome’s hair as she looked to the sky.

She looked even more stunning than yesterday.

“Right. If that’s the situation, it can’t be helped. I have to help you, and I already promised... I am full, thank you.”

Kazuhiro closed the lid on the empty bento box.

“Anyways, why do you hide your face by wearing glasses? For your performance?”

Even if that was for her performance, wouldn’t it be really painful to hide her true self every day?

“I... I do voice acting for a living. That’s why...”

Saotome’s voice differed from her icy attitude earlier. Her voice was stiff.

“Because... because I rely on my voice to get a salary. Of course I can’t let other people hear my voice so easily.”

Saotome explained as she put her hands on her waist.

“Sure, don’t worry about it. You don’t have to get so worked up…”

Her explanation was quite forced, and Kazuhiro could see that she pretended to be calm and collected. It looked like there was more to it than her short explanation.

Kazuhiro had no plan to investigate this matter further.

One of Kazuhiro’s principles was not forcing girls to do things that they didn’t want to do. Actually, it was more accurate to call it his habit.

“In conclusion, there is no set time limit on this fake relationship, and this won’t end until you become well-accustomed to the whole dating thing, right?”

“Hmm, right.”

“......Ok. I will humor you until then.”

Kazuhiro was a good guy through and through.

When a girl was in trouble, it was his duty to help her.

“Thank you very much. You can also think of this as practice. After I graduate from this training session, I will also help you to find a girlfriend.”

“Ah... that is kind of you.”

It didn’t occur to Kazuhiro that the end of their contract was not the end of their relationship, at least in reputation. In order for him to successfully find a girlfriend afterward, he had to make it so that he cleanly terminated their relationship.

“It was I who dragged you into this. After this is over, I will be the villain and ‘dump’ you. You will be troubled if you get the reputation of a playboy, right?”

“I don’t want to be a playboy, but it’s also not the best idea for you to act as a frivolous girl.”

“Doesn't really matter. Then—”

Then, Saotome’s expression changed. Her eyes were moist, and her arms were held on her chest. She stared intensely at Kazuhiro.

Kazuhiro’s heart started to beat violently.

Saotome has morphed from a scheming, devious girl to a maiden in love.

“Poor Kazuhiro-kun, please let ‘me’ comfort you.”

Her face came very close to Kazuhiro's, so close that he could feel her breath on his face.

“This is not sympathy. ‘I’ have liked you since a long times ago, but you always had others, so I could only give up... but... but ‘I’ could not erase you from my mind no matter what ‘I’ do! ‘I’ love you! ‘I’ love you so much, Kazuhiro-kun!”

Saotome’s raw romantic emotion flooded into Kazuhiro’s chest.

His mind was in turmoil, as if he was pounded by a humongous force. He was about to explode.

“... Afterward, a girl like this might appear for real?!”

Saotome suddenly reverted from maiden-mode to normal. She laughed happily.

“You... don’t scare me like that!”

Saotome was the real thing. Her voice acting skills were that of a professional. Even though Kazuhiro knew this was all an act, he was still swept up by the mode, almost believed that the whole thing had been real.

“I don’t intend to be in a relationship anytime soon, and I don’t care if others call me bad names behind my back.”

“Even if you don’t need a boyfriend, you still need to interact with female friends! I don’t really want to resort to this to ruin another person's reputation.”

Although they were not a real couple, they still had tons of problems to resolves afterwards.

In a genuine romance, one wouldn't think about the various problems that would follow the breakup before it even began.

References[edit]

1. ↑ "I" here refer to あたし(atashi), or how a girl would refer to herself to make it sound cute.

Chapter 3: Hunted After by MIB?

Part 1[edit]

“Kazuhiro, let’s go home together!”

Saotome approached Kazuhiro as the afternoon’s class was over.

“Oh, yeah, sure.”

Kazuhiro absentmindedly agreed, and Saotome hugged his arm from his back.

Her boobs… they came in contact with his elbow.

So “soft”… Ah, no. Her boobs were so soft.

This softness… was truly unimaginable if one only looked at them.

“Those two are showing off again!”

“Kazu, good luck!”

Drowned by the classmates’ — mostly girls’ — encouraging words, Kazuhiro was dragged outside by Saotome.

“Wait! Slow down…”

“We already behaved like that this morning. This can’t be helped.”

Saotome drew her lips closer to Kazuhiro, and whispered in his ear, so close that Kazuhiro could feel Saotome’s intermittent stream of hot breaths on his ear.

“Seeing how we started off in the morning, I think we would be best off playing the role of a pair of newly-wed, oblivious couple.”

Ah, so that was it. As an actor, Saotome made an accurate assessment of their current situation, since it would seem really unnatural if they suddenly behaved differently than before.

This meant even more trouble for Kazuhiro, who was only dragged into the whole mess.

To be honest though, Kazuhiro could no longer tell whether he was happy about or bothered by the whole thing.

Saotome unexpectedly tightened her grip on Kazuhiro’s arm. She drew her face closer to Kazuhiro’s as well. A pleasant fragrance, possibly either her shampoo or her perfume, rushed into his nose.

“What happened?”

“N-nothing.”

Saotome looked up and stared intently at Kazuhiro.

He was drowning in her fragrance and the tender sensation of their skin in contact.

This kind of feeling could not be acquired through only talking with “female friends”.

“Alright, let’s maintain this position. It's bad if we act like strangers as soon as we get out of school. We might encounter acquaintances.”

Saotome gripped his arm even more tightly. They were approaching closer and closer toward each other.

Even though there were couples who were holding hands all around them, Kazuhiro and Saotome were the only pair who acted so intimately.

Kazuhiro felt as if he was floating in the air.

It was all a sham, she was not his real girlfriend.

Even though he should not be too pleased with the circumstances, he still couldn’t help but feel thrilled.

“Concentrating all firepower in a short amount of time will make it end faster. This will make it easier as well for Kazuhiro to get a girlfriend,” Saotome had said something like this.

After they exited the campus, Saotome once again put up distance between them. She gradually released her hold on Kazuhiro’s arm, finally letting it go altogether.

“Ah…”

Kazuhiro could not control his voice.

"Ok, this is it for today. I am off for work."

She had said, that she must be somewhere for the recording of a children's puppet show.

"I-is that so? Good luck."

"Thanks."

Having seen Kazuhiro waving his hands, Saotome nodded her head in response.

"So… this is how one would feel…"

"What… what's up?"

"This is how one would feel when her boyfriend try to cheer her up… I feel really happy, almost as if I have received some sort of mysterious power…"

Saotome produced a winning smile, with her cheeks a tad bit flushed, making Kazuhiro's heart beat in a frenzy.

"But, you are still a fake boyfriend. Don't fall for me for real."

She turned and ran toward the entrance for checkin as she left those words for Kazuhiro.

Kazuhiro glared at her receding figure with a dull expression. Then, his phone rang in his pocket.

"Ah, shoot!"

It wasn't an incoming mail nor a phone call. It was a warning for the alarm clock that he had set previously.

Saotome was not the only one who was busy. Kazuhiro also had some urgent matters to attend to.

He jogged toward the "Honey Drops", and entered through the backdoor.

He didn't have a shift today, but he came anyway because of Sanae's request. The two of them had promised to meet in a prearranged spot.

"Yagimoto-san, sorry for the trouble."

“Sorry, I am late.”

Kazuhiro was late to the appointment by two minutes. Sanae was already there, in her sailor uniform.

“Eh… so how can I help you today?”

Sanae also asked Kazuhiro to be her fake boyfriend, but he was not aware of the exact details yet. It couldn’t be that she was also a voice actor, and needed his help in earning credits and graduating from Dating101?

“I-I am truly sorry for the trouble…”

Her eyes were looking downward, and she kept moving her fingers in circles.

Sanae and Saotome requested the same thing from them, the difference was that Sanae would not resort to hugging him from behind to coerce him into help her. This rather fitted her elegant appearance.

“We need to get rid of the uniforms. Can you come with me?”

“What!”

Sanae extended her hand, quite a bold move for her. She grabbed Kazuhiro’s hand and started running, dragging him along.

Without giving a chance for Kazuhiro to ask any question, they had already arrived at a high-end brand store near the station.

He had heard of this brand before, and it was expensive. He probably couldn’t even afford a single handkerchief under its name.

Usually, Kazuhiro took a lot of care in his appearance. Due to the lack of bills in his wallet, he employed the cheapest method, maintaining a clean, tidy look.

“Lady Sanae, welcome.”

As Sanae entered the premise, all the salesman and saleswoman lined up on both sides of the entrance, in a low bowing position.

“Good work.”

Sanae responded with a confident smile.

Kazuhiro, on the other hand, stood there with his mouth hanging open.

What happened? Am I still living in the same world? Is this normal life for an elite?

This was really shocking, to think that the kind of creature known as noble ladies really exists.

“The products that you ordered have already arrived.”

“Thank you. Moreover, can you pick a set of clothes for him?”

“Of course, please come this way.”

Then, without a moment of pause, Kazuhiro was dragged into the changing room, changing into several set of clothes, with the help of quite a few employees at the store.

A pair of simple yet elegant pants and a jacket in blue and gray, matched with a slim necktie and a bright-colored shirt, looked formal enough without losing class.

High-quality products were high-quality without a doubt. The set of clothes felt light, despite being very formal. By comparison, the uniform that Kazuhiro usually wore was almost unfit for his body.

“Ah, Yagimoto-san, you look really nice.”

Sanae, who has already changed into her formal wear, said with her arms crossed on her chest.

She had shed her uniform, in favor of a chic gown.

“I am really sorry. I should have also ordered a custom-made suit for Yagimoto-san, but I was really out of time.”

Sanae’s gown was custom-made, as mentioned earlier. Kazuhiro’s getup was also not cheap. Still, custom-made clothes would be even more expensive, so expensive that it was hard to make a guess on the price.

“Let’s go, Yagimoto-san… ah.”

Before Sanae’s hand reached Kazuhiro, she shouted.

“What’s up, Tenkyuuin-san?”

“We are lovers, so I should call you Kazuhiro-san.”

Sanae nodded her head, and said with a smile on her face, “Please call me Sanae as well.”

“Emm, yeah… Sanae…-san.”

Calling Saotome by her name was already stretching it. As for a demure, elegant, and intelligent female like Sanae, calling her name was really embarrassing.

To make it worse, Sanae referred him by “-san”.

Since Sanae already offered, as a man, Kazuhiro should take the initiative, and just standing there like an idiot was quite bizarre as well. Kazuhiro also extended his hand and clutched on Sanae, letting her wrap her hands around his arm.

This was quite different from Saotome’s case. With the formal wear on both of them, they looked like social elites or Hollywood star or something.

“Eh… where are we headed now?”

“An art gallery that I frequently visit. Shall we go there and drink tea?”

A frequently visited art gallery… that kind of place sounded really high-class. Kazuhiro would not normally be associated with that sort of thing.

Kazuhiro has always had a feeling, ever since Sanae got hired at the maid’s café, about Sanae not knowing about a lot of things in the real world, almost as if she did not truly live in this world. Who was she?

Besides, he was still not sure of the reason for her request.

Kazuhiro led the way toward the art gallery, while Sanae told him the directions. Male walked on the outer rim of the walk, and was always half a step in the lead. They maintained a moderate pace, so that the girl wouldn’t get tired.

Even though Kazuhiro never got a chance to practice these formalities, he did at least know them well beforehand.

However, perhaps it was because of his nervousness, his motion was quite rigid.

“Hehe… Kazuhiro-san, are you perhaps nervous?”

“Eh… yeah, a bit…”

They stopped before the crosswalk. Kazuhiro stretched his back, and Sanae laughed at the sight.

Kazuhiro usually helped the clueless Sanae with her job. Today, he has seen another side of her.

“Usually I have a ride, though it is pretty close from here.”

Sanae said, as she pressed on the button for crosswalk.

“Ahh!”

Again, too late to stop her.

As Sanae’s hand touched the button, the traffic signal’s red light flashed violently. The warning sound for the traffic light also changed its tone, constantly emanating noises.

“S-sorry… I always wanted to press on it, so I just pressed it without thinking…”

“Sanae-san, you forgot again that you can’t touch any machine.”

A passer-by saw the unusual scene, and promptly reported it to the police. Even though the scene was quite disordered, no catastrophe came out of it.

It was lucky that the light was still in red. If it was in green, a traffic accident could have happened.

“What… do we do? It was my fault…”

“You didn’t do it on purpose. Please be careful next time.”

Kazuhiro comforted Sanae, who was in an agitated state.

It was useless to talk to the police about Sanae’s special ability, that any machine would go out of order upon her touch. The best decision was to immediately leave the venue.

As Kazuhiro turned his head and thought about the incident, he spotted a few suspicious individuals.

They were not people who were disturbed by the malfunction of the traffic light.

They were staring at him, and they hid themselves as their eyes were about to meet.

That was not quite right. The three strangers weren't hiding at all.

One of them was an older woman who wore black suit. She looked above twenty, and wore a pair of sunglasses, covering up her face.

Behind her, two men wearing the same attire followed. They wore black hats on their head.

They were a hundred percent suspicious, and looked like freelance workers in the black market, otherwise known as gangsters.

If pressed to come up with a few more examples, they looked like the kind of creature often seen on TV, the kind of creatures that would erase the memory of people who accidentally caught sight of UFO.

Sanae… could it be that she is an alien?

If that was so, then everything make sense.

All of her uncharacteristic traits, not knowing much about how the world worked or the special ability to make machines malfunction with just a single touch, could be explained logically.

"Excuse me… do I have something on my face?"

"N-no. Nothing."

Kazuhiro forced an unnatural smile, desperately trying to abandon the absurd hypothesis.

No matter what, that was not possible.

His childhood friend was a karate master who could easily beat a wild bear. His classmate was a voice actor. He was asked to do a weird request by three girls on the same day. Against these odd occurrences, Kazuhiro was already used to the daily absurdities.

Still, an alien was out of the question. It couldn't be true. Even absurdity should have its limit.

"Sanae-san, I think there are suspicious people following us right now."

Kazuhiro resorted to inquiry.

He knew that he himself did nothing dubious. Thus, the one being stalked must be Sanae.

“Shh, don’t make a sound. Please pretend as if we haven’t seen them.”

“Yeah, sure…”

Sanae whispered while holding her finger on her mouth. Kazuhiro replied softly as well.

“I am really sorry. I can’t explain the details right now. The only thing that I can say… is that our relationship is really intimate. In other words, we are lo… lov… lov…” Sanae stammered.

Her voice grew smaller and smaller, and her snowy cheek was gradually colored with a tint of pink.

“The fact that Kazuhiro-san and I are lovers… must be seen by those people!”

“Whoo!”

Sanae’s persistence caused Kazuhiro to let out a squeal despite himself. He immediately covered his own mouth afterward.

“We are on a d-date, right? Anyways, we need to let them see that we are together, or else…”

what is happening? Presently, the situation did not allow any time for Kazuhiro to inquire more.

One thing was known for sure. Sanae must be a dilemma. If the trio who was following them heard Sanae’s explanation, that this date is just a pretense, everything would come to light. Kazuhiro could only go with the flow and keep acting.

Amidst their hurried conversation, the couple have arrived at the said art gallery. It was a petit building built with red brick. There was an open-air café inside.

“It can’t be, lady Sanae? Welcome to our gallery.”

The manager of the gallery, similar to the salespeople, made an effort to come out and greet Sanae. She talked on and on about the works exhibited in the gallery, about how this artist was a local-born youngster, who won a prize in New York last year, and had a bright future ahead.

“Don’t worry about us. Today I am on a date, just a quick visit.”

“What? D-date?”

“Yes. Let’s go in, Kazuhiro-san.”

“Yeah, sure… I am not too confident on my knowledge of paintings. Please enlighten me, Sanae-san.”

In order to cooperate with Sanae on their act, Kazuhiro suddenly adopted an extremely polite attitude.

Since Sanae was a frequent visitor, Kazuhiro decided to leave everything to her, or else he might make mistakes.

Sanae also seemed to understand Kazuhiro’s intention, and proceeded to give details about the art works.

“This is the first painting to obtain the highest honor in Paris.”

“These paintings have their own unique art style.”

…… Sanae was quite cheery as she went on and on.

Kazuhiro could only stand there and listen, trying to not let his mouth hanging open.

Because of frequent request by girls to plan their dates, Kazuhiro used to stay up all night figuring out everything there was to know about date.

Sanae’s professional tour was a first-hand experience of real knowledge, instead of Kazuhiro’s all-night cramming. She probably came here very often.

“A question… Is Kazuhiro-san bored? Because I am speaking all the time…”

“T-that can’t be. I am really happy to see another side of Sanae-san.”

“If you speak in this fashion, I will be really embarrassed…”

Sanae looked down, her face coated with a film of pink.

As they were about to depart from the art gallery, Kazuhiro took a sneak glance behind his shoulders, and discovered that the three of them were still following.

If they were only stalking, it was still acceptable. What if they wanted to harm Sanae? What then?

Even if he was only pretending, he was still her boyfriend. He had the responsibility to be the knight in shining armor if she was in distress.

Nevertheless, it was three versus one, and he wouldn't have a chance no matter what… if only he was as powerful as Takana…

He couldn't help but shake his head at this train of thoughts.

On a date, he was not supposed to think about other girls, even if this wasn't a real one.

"I want two big-mac and a large orange juice, with fries."

Right. I am even hallucinating about Takana's voice.

What?

Kazuhiro couldn't help himself but turned his head.

About ten meters away was a fast food restaurant, and Takana was currently there buying her meal.

This wasn't a hallucination. This was real. Takana herself was standing there.

She was definitely planning to fill up her stomach before her club activity start.

From the look of it, Takana was only thinking of eating, and has not yet spotted Kazuhiro. However, if he was discovered, how should he explain this?

Could a lame excuse like "we are not actually dating" really solve the misunderstanding?

No, wait. Optimism was overrated. The best strategy was to get out of here quick, and evade all problems.

If Takana decided to fight here, this area would be in danger.

"S-Sanae-san, we need to get out of here!"

"Eh?"

Kazuhiro grabbed the confused Sanae and quickly exited the scene.

To confirm, he looked behind him to check if Sanae was actually there.

Sanae was trying hard to keep up with him. It seemed like she doesn’t jog often. It was more like she was stumbling. It looked rather dangerous.

After a while, the two of them left Takana’s immediate surroundings. She was far away, wholly absorbed in eating her hamburger.

However, the other group still kept following them.

The other group was, of course, referring to the three suspicious individuals in black.

Kazuhiro’s usual composed self was lost at the sudden appearance of Takana. He should have known that if he retreated in a hurry, the three of them would surely follow.

He could hear the footsteps of the two men beside the woman, loud and clear from a distance.

This was a misunderstanding, but he could not just stop and tell them that he didn’t mean to get away from them.

He could not predict what would happen if they caught up with him. Perhaps their location would be discovered by Takana, if they cause a scene.

“Let’s go, Kazuhiro-san! Let’s go to Heaven hotel.”

“Yeah, sure!”

Anyways, the best plan right now was to keep a distance away from the trio, and also from Takana.

Kazuhiro and Sanae ran all the way to Kyuuhito’s Heaven hotel.

The Heaven hotel was a first-class hotel in this city. No matter its height from ground, price, or quality, it was the best in town.

They crossed through the front gate, manned by a security guard in uniform. In front of them was a lobby decorated with red carpet and a grand chevalier, illuminating the entire lobby with tender light.

For a normal high school student, this kind of scenery belonged to another world.

“Whew… it should be fine here.”

Kazuhiro checked around him. The trio as well as Takana was nowhere to be seen.

“Kazuhiro-san… why did we run so hastily? What happened…?”

“Eh? Whoa! Sorry!”

Kazuhiro rapidly removed his hand from Sanae’s, as he just realized that he was still holding onto it.

“Well, it’s ok. It was kind of like playing hide-and-seek when I was a child. It was quite interesting. Also… Kazuhiro-san and I are lovers… so it is really ok.”

Sanae’s face was as red as tomato, and she covered her mouth with her hand, previously held by Kazuhiro.

At that moment, Kazuhiro finally realized an important matter.

Even though they might have escaped from stalkers, they were in a hotel.

Were they left with no choice but to spend a night here? A boy and a girl?

No matter how imperative the circumstance, didn’t checking into a hotel on their first date seem a little bit inappropriate?

Fortunately, Sanae was braver than a normal girl.

No, wait. It was best not to anticipate too much from this. What if this was also a god’s shenanigan?

In Kazuhiro’s pocket, his cellphone rang, interrupting his thought.

“It looks like Kazuhiro-san’s phone call. Please don’t mind me, and pick up the call.”

“Yeah, excuse me for a second.”

“Ah, is it Kazuhiro? It’s me, you okay?”

Kazuhiro almost let out a squeal upon hearing this.

The person who called Kazuhiro was no one other than Saotome.

Why did she have to pick such a time?

Kazuhiro wanted to respond with a simple “what’s up?”, but he decided against it at the last moment.

What if those MIB (Men in Black) were still shadowing him?

If he reverted back to his normal self, he would not look like Sanae’s boyfriend.

“Hey! You okay? Even if I am a fake, I am still your girlfriend, right? Are you not happy at all to get my call?”

Calm down! Calm down!

The best solution in this crisis was to keep acting like Sanae’s boyfriend!

“Hey… hey! Why the sudden call, did something come up?”

“It’s time for intercession break. I suddenly recalled that in TV drama, girls would call their boyfriends, only to hear their voices. That’s why I decided to call you. Is it similar to how real couple would do?”

In TV drama, there was a clichéd scene where a man would get a call from his wife in the middle of a date with his mistress. Was it this kind of feeling?

That wasn’t right, wait… in this case, who was the wife? Who was the mistress?

No, no, no. Calm down. None of them was the wife. They were all fake!

“I-I see. Ah, I feel honored, truly happy.”

Kazuhiro held his breath, and said in a low tone, desperately trying to maintain his act.

“Huh! You are not talking like your usual self. The way you are speaking is pretty weird.”

Saotome let off a laugh at the other end of the call.

Even Kazuhiro knew that there was beyond ridiculous.

However, the only way out now was to act in his designated role no matter what. This was no other way!

“Sorry, I am seriously really busy right now. Is it possible to contact me later?”

“Haha! My nervousness was cured thanks to your antics. Because of you, now I have incentive to do the second part of my work. Thanks.”

Saotome thought that Kazuhiro was only joking. She ended the call amidst her mirthful laughter.

“Sigh…”

A sudden fit of fatigue invaded Kazuhiro, causing him to slug his shoulders.

Kazuhiro hoped that a horrifying assault like this do not happen again.

“Is Kazuhiro-san finished with phone call? Let’s go to the top floor.”

Sanae said with her head tilted.

In this hotel, the top floor was not for accommodation, but rather a lookout restaurant.

There were a lot of servers in the elevator. On a simple request, they would gladly serve customers, so that there wasn’t any need for pressing the buttons.

“So… is it really expensive here?”

Kazuhiro couldn’t help himself but asked, because this building was not only tall in height, but also terrifyingly expensive.

“Please don’t worry about it, Kazuhiro-san. It’s I who asked the favor, so of course I would pay for it.”

Everything that followed was the same as before. The two of them again were treated like VIPs. They were brought to a table with the best view.

The waiter pulled back the chair for Sanae, allowing her to sit down. Kazuhiro sat across her accordingly.

Then, another waiter– no, even though she was wearing a waiter’s uniform, she was a girl, so she should be called a waitress– brought the menu to the table.

“Hello, this is the menu.”

“Wow!”

Kazuhiro was so scared that he almost shouted out, but he managed to cover his mouth in the last moment.

“Sir, is there something of matter?”

He has seen this rigid smile before. Even though she changed into waiter’s uniform, there could be no mistake.

This waitress was one of the trio who followed them earlier– the beautiful short-haired woman. She almost went unnoticed, because she switched from wearing sunglasses to frameless glasses.

Kazuhiro glanced across him. Sanae’s lips was slightly stiff as well, trying too hard to look composed.

“Sir and madam, is there… something of matter?”

The short-haired, beautiful woman spoke in an unyielding tone, filled with menace. She did however maintain a polite demeanor.

From close up, she had a pair of slender eyes. She was definitely an intelligent beauty. However, she exuded an oppressing aura that prevented people from approaching her. She seemed to have a cold personality, almost like a big sister of numerous gangsters.

“No-nothing. Nothing at all.”

Kazuhiro took a deep breath, and reminded himself to not be afraid.

What was it that Sanae expected him to do?

Of course, that would be acting in the role of a lover, and showing his manliness.

Although Sanae was paying for the meal, in this kind of situation, a man gotta do what a man could do, not to mention that the waitress already brought over the menu.

If that was so, the only choice left was to improvise.

Kazuhiro glared hard at the mysterious beauty, and turned to Sanae, showing off a smile.

He resolved himself to not back down, and not give up.

As a man, and as a boyfriend, I will protect you.

That said, being a fake lover was still pretty sad.

“It’s still too early to eat dinner, and I have something to do later anyways. Can we just order some snacks?”

“Of course, please go ahead.”

Sanae replied with her head tilted.

Good. This wasn’t a wrong decision.

Though, it came with an enormous responsibility.

Kazuhiro quickly swept through the contents of the menu.

Most of it was composed of foreign language, hard to understand for Kazuhiro. Granted, there were tiny Japanese translations on the side, but terms like “Burgundy flavor” were confusing, and Kazuhiro was not able to comprehend such words.

“Please bring us two servings of chef’s daily special for the desserts.”

Finally, Kazuhiro came up with the safe card. He was not able to understand the katakana written on the menu, but was saved by a Japanese kanji, meaning dessert.

“What would you like for the drink?”

The short-haired beauty questioned with a pondering expression.

If he had to confirm with the lady before making any decision, he would not be the boyfriend anymore. Thus, he had to form his own opinions.

“This lady would like a black tea, while I’ll have coffee.”

Ok, no problem. Sanae usually drank black tea while at work, so it should be the correct choice.

“Black tea and coffee, ok. What kind of black tea and coffee would you like?”

“Eh?”

Another unexpected question.

This place did not specialize in tea, did they really need to go down to such minor details?

Honey Drops’ drinks did not go into such detailed categorization. Coffee was made from whole-sale cocoa beans and by a standard coffee machine. Black tea was made from tea bags, the kind that was easily purchasable from store.

“Kazuhiro-san, I don’t want Keemun tea, instead I’ll have Darjeeling. It’s not that I don’t trust this place. If there happens to be a small difference, the mouth feel would be drastically different.”

“The order will be as she said. For me, I’ll have Columbian coffee.”

“Chee… ok, please wait a moment.”

The beauty bowed, and did not forget to make a small “chee” sound as she departed, a noise that did not escape Kazuhiro’s ears.

So dangerous. It was good that Sanae helped. Keemun was already pretty high-end, but he had never even heard of Darjeeling tea. It was good that he didn’t pretend to know this stuff, or else he could have humiliated himself just now.

One thing was apparent from this crisis, though.

That was, this woman (and her underlings) must be related to Sanae somehow.

Another thing to note was that they must be pretty familiar with each other, as she even knew Sanae’s preference for tea.

If they are from the underground society, did that imply that Sanae was the daughter of a mafia boss?

If that was so, it was not hard to understand why Sanae didn’t know a lot of stuff about the real world.

“Kazuhiro-san, please.”

Sanae gazed at Kazuhiro, who was in contemplation. She had a serious expression.

“I know that Kazuhiro-san must have a lot of inquiries, and I can’t really explain them all clearly…”

“Don’t worry, I understand.”

Even though the crust of the matter might be quite complicated, he had already accepted her request.

Moreover, a man who asked around too much with the lady unwilling to speak was bound to be unpopular.

“Sorry for the wait.”

After a while, the beauty from before served them with cakes and drinks. Normally, a waitress was expected to leave after the service, but she hid behind a pillar near them and continued to observe him.

Her position was right behind Sanae, so Kazuhiro was able to see her every move.

Kazuhiro didn’t know whether she didn’t want Sanae to discover her, or she wanted to exert some pressure on him.

Calm down. Calm down.

The dessert was nothing rare. It was only normal baked cheese cake.

What was written on the dining decorum that he had so avidly scrutinized before?

If it was a triangular cake, one should start from the cake’s left side, to cut exactly one bite with the sharp edge of the knife, and bring it to one’s mouth.

Afraid of messing up the table decorum, Kazuhiro carefully cut the cake.

The soft cake meekly resisted against his fork, but was nevertheless split into two halves. He secured the bite with his fork, brought it to his mouth meticulously, and finally swallowed the bite. He was careful not to extend his neck in the process.

One must take care to be elegant when eating, with no sound, and swallow only when adequately chewed.

There was nothing to be afraid of in a high class observatory restaurant.

In the end, it was only a cheese cake.

Kazuhiro risked a glance at the trio, who was spying on him.

As expected, the beauty was spying on him. The other two was taking note on their surroundings.

We'll see who have the last laugh. Even though I don't know what you are after, I will uphold my role as a conscientious boyfriend.

Perhaps it was because his concentration was broken by observing the trio, the cheese cake collapsed due to decreasing ground work.

"Uhh!"

According to the correct decorum, what should he do in this situation?

How should he attack the cheese cake, which is laid down?

In a wrestling match, this kind of situation sometimes would arise.

Similarly, Kazuhiro was fighting with a fork.

What should he do, attack now or until it stood up again?

As a side note, he learned these from Takana, who loved martial arts manga.

The beauty was still spying on Kazuhiro.

Her eyes suggested that she was waiting for Kazuhiro to make a mistake, so that all of his efforts until now would be wasted.

What should he do? What was the best choice?

Inside Kazuhiro's mind, a sad minor chord has resounded. His forehead even showed signs of sweat.

"Emm… Kazuhiro-san…"

"Eh?"

Kazuhiro raised his head as he heard the sound, and saw Sanae smiling at him.

"Is Kazuhiro-san… not happy when hanging out with me?"

"H-How can that be… there is no such thing."

"Can you relax a bit? Seeing your scary facial expression, I am also becoming very nervous. I can't even savor the cake."

Looking closely, Sanae's cake also laid down in front of her. She cut them into small pieces, and fed them into her mouth.

Right, so it was like this.

When a cake laid itself down, there was no need to make it stand up again. Simply eating it normally until the last bite would do.

After relaxing, Kazuhiro was able to savor the cheesecake. No matter the softness, the fineness, or the mouth feel, it was excellent. There was a saying that a master dessert chef could make the most average dessert taste amazing.

“T-This cake was quite delicious.”

“Yes. It seems that this trip was not in vain.”

It was a miscalculation.

On a date, he fussed over such trivial matters, making his girlfriend worry.

He already accepted the request to pretend to be her boyfriend, so he should take this role seriously. How could he cause her more inconvenience?

Showing discontented expressions just because he was nervous, he really had no right to act as a fake boyfriend.

It seemed that merely prepping was not enough, he must learn to improvise.

“Thank you, Sanae-san.”

Kazuhiro said softly. Sanae replied by squinted her eyes.

After the last bite, Sanae put her fork inside the napkin. Kazuhiro did the same.

Sparing a glance toward the beauty, Kazuhiro saw half of her body behind the pillar, biting into the napkin as if with regret.

What did she want?

“Sanae-san, let’s go.”

“Ok, Kazuhiro-san.”

After finishing the tea, the two of them chatted about work. Afterward, Kazuhiro stood up.

He pretended as if there was no problem, and looked around him. The beauty was nowhere in sight. He released his breath as he confirmed the fact.

“So… Kazuhiro-san, thank you for today.”

“I am glad as well.”

Kazuhiro replied as they exited the restaurant.

As a side note, the bill was paid on Sanae's credit.

"Sanae-san… perhaps I can't help much, but please notify me if something come up. I will help as much as I can."

Even though he didn't want to force Sanae to tell him the whole circumstance, but he knew that he would regret it for the rest of his life if Sanae was in some kind of trouble and he didn't know about it.

The fact that Sanae asked him to act as her boyfriend meant that there was no other people she could trust.

"Kazuhiro-san, there is nothing to worry about…"

"Is that so? About the people who were just stalking us, you know nothing?"

"It…"

Sanae suddenly became incoherent.

"Sorry. I can't speak of it right now. If I talk, Kazuhiro-san will…"

"If you speak like this, I can't just leave it alone."

Seeing Sanae turned her head with a pained expression, Kazuhiro asked despite himself.

"…I swear, this matter won't harm me physically in any way. The details… must wait until I mentally prepare myself."

"There is really no danger."

"Yes."

Sanae did not look away this time, staring right at Kazuhiro bravely.

It didn't seem like that she was lying.

"…Ok, I trust you. You can come to me if anything come up."

Usually, the two parties should exchange their contact information. The problem was that Sanae didn't have a cell phone, so Kazuhiro could only resort to writing down his cellphone number, email, and address on a piece of paper.

"It is a promise."

Sanae extended her right hand, and uncurled her pinky finger.

“Eh… I heard that one should do this for a promise… is it strange?”

“Nope, not at all. Let’s do a pinky promise.”

The nervousness from before completely disappeared.

Kazuhiro extended his own pinky, and hooked onto Sanae’s, both of them shaking their hand.

“Cutting one’s finger and getting beaten up ten thousand times, liars will be cursed to swallow a thousand needles~”

Sanae softly hymned, and Kazuhiro followed.

At that instant, the cellphone in his pocket rang.

“Ah!”

“Kazuhiro-san, what happened?”

“Hmm, something came up…”

Kazuhiro replied as he turned off the alarm clock on his phone.

“Then, by all means, please I’ll excuse myself. I am really ok.”

“Seriously, there is no problem?”

“It’s true. If something come up I will for sure go talk with Kazuhiro-san.”

Since Sanae already put it this way, the only choice was to trust her. The current situation was that she didn’t want to speak about what was the problem, and so he couldn’t help her even if he wanted to.

“Ok. I’ll be off. Bye.”

Kazuhiro nodded, and immediately sprinted into the elevator just now arrived.

The next mission could not wait, not even for a single second.